

# Rep. Sharon Tomiko Santos

## 37th District Legislative Update

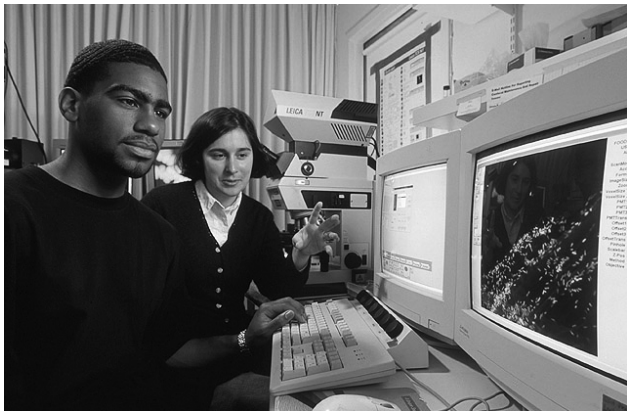
### JOBS FOR THE FUTURE

The legislature took steps to head off what demographic data point to as a potential skilled worker shortage in the near future. According to a recent news report, 42 % of the workforce at Puget Sound Energy will be eligible for retirement within the next five years. Health care providers already feel the effects of a shortage of qualified nurses in our area.

Job training and recruitment efforts that target high-demand fields such as these will help to sustain our state's economy and productivity. In addition, support for emerging industries such as biotechnology and life sciences present greater opportunities for our state to lead the nation in jobs for the 21st century. At the same time, our strategies cannot overlook the needs of small businesses that anchor our neighborhoods and communities.

This session, we adopted legislation to help expand economic opportunities, foster employment, and increase access to family-wage jobs for everyone. These include:

- ✓ Increasing the capacity of Skills Centers and expanding apprenticeship utilization requirements for school districts to provide students with opportunities to train for family-wage jobs.
- ✓ Authorizing local governments to create Small Works rosters to increase the accessibility of public contracts to small businesses.
- ✓ Expanding the Linked Deposit program to boost the availability of business capital for minority-owned and women-owned businesses.
- ✓ Creating Innovative Partnership Zones to strengthen collaborations between researchers, entrepreneurs, and workforce training providers.

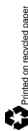


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37th District

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## 37th District Legislative Update



Rep. Sharon Tomiko Santos

June 2007

Dear Neighbor,

The Legislature recently concluded a 105-day session and I am pleased to share with you some highlights of our accomplishments that will improve the quality of life for Washington families.

We made historic investments in education, in health care, and in job development. In this newsletter, you'll find information about our state's growing economy as well as charts depicting the 2007-2009 operating budget expenditures and revenues. While we have much yet to do, I believe we made important fiscal and policy advances this session that point us in the right direction for the future.

As an example, we finally succeeded in passing simple majority legislation for school levies. For the first time in 63 years, the voters of Washington will decide whether school districts can pass levies with a simple majority (50% + 1) rather than requiring a supermajority (60% +) vote. This measure necessitates a constitutional amendment that will appear on your election ballot in the fall.

I remain staunchly dedicated to protecting our civil and human rights. I am especially proud to report that the Legislature approved and the Governor signed into law a domestic partnership bill to provide same-sex couples with some fundamental rights, including the right to hospital visitation, to make autopsy and organ donation decisions about a loved one, and to inherit from one another in the absence of a will. This represents a significant step forward in legally removing the second-class citizenship status of too many of our families, friends, and neighbors.

Thank you for taking the time to review this newsletter. I welcome your thoughts on what we accomplished this year. Please stay in touch by calling, e-mailing, or writing to me about the issues that concern you. I appreciate your continued interest and involvement in our state government and I am honored to represent you in Olympia. Sincerely,

*Sharon Tomiko Santos*

Sharon Tomiko Santos  
State Representative, 37th District



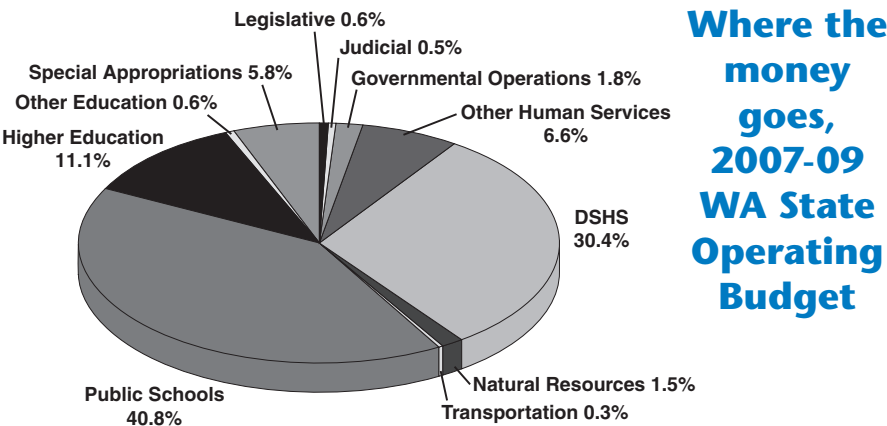
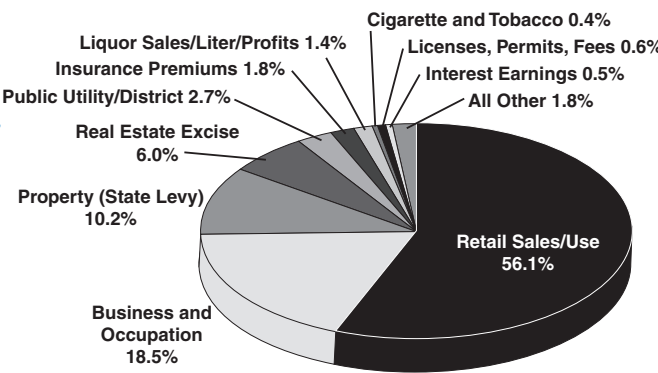
THE STATE OF THE BUDGET

- Overall, the economic news for our state is upbeat:
- ✓ Washington state ranks sixth in the nation in job growth.
  - ✓ Washington added 62,000 new jobs in 2006 at a rate double the national average.
  - ✓ The state’s unemployment rate hit a 30-year low (4.6%) in March.
  - ✓ The state budget’s revenue projections increased by \$2 billion.

Nevertheless, since the legislature significantly reduced funding for vital programs and services during leaner times, we needed to reverse the effects of previous budget cuts in the 2007-2009 fiscal biennium. In addition, the legislature aimed to set aside some money in an emergency reserve account to minimize the impact on the operating budget should our state face a future revenue shortfall resulting from declining employment or an unforeseen catastrophe.

- In the end, we adopted a responsible two-year budget that:
- ✓ Invests in education, health care, human services, and public safety, without increasing general taxes.
  - ✓ Protects the most vulnerable populations in our state: children, aging adults, people with disabilities, and low-income families.
  - ✓ Maintains a reasonable reserve balance, \$724 million, which includes \$165 million for a “rainy day fund” if approved by voters this fall.

Where the money comes from, 2007-09 Biennium Revenues



INVESTING IN EDUCATION

Education is the most important investment we can make in our children – and in our future - providing the greatest return for our public dollars.



A quality education opens many doors and is essential to obtaining a living-wage job in our increasingly competitive global economy. This session, we made critical investments across the full spectrum of our public education system, from pre-K to college, which will:

- ✓ Improve access to quality early learning programs and phase in full-day kindergarten, beginning in schools with the highest poverty rates.
- ✓ Lower class size by fully funding I-732 and raise teachers’ salaries by fully funding I-728.
- ✓ Recruit and retain quality educators and encourage today’s students to consider a teaching career.
- ✓ Foster innovative partnerships between schools and communities to help students who are at risk of not graduating.
- ✓ Expand Opportunity Grants and other financial aid programs to increase access to higher education.



EXPANDING HEALTH CARE COVERAGE

I believe that access to health care is a basic right and should not be a privilege available only to those who can afford it. But, today, an increasing number of working families can’t afford health insurance.

We can do better. This legislative session, we took steps to improve the health of Washington residents and to make health care more affordable and accessible by:

- ✓ Expanding health care coverage for 38,000 more children, keeping us on track to cover every child by 2010, and improving children’s mental health services.
- ✓ Eliminating the prescription drug co-payments for low-income seniors hurt by Medicare, Part D coverage gaps.
- ✓ Permitting licensed dental hygienists to provide basic dental health services – such as teeth cleaning and fluoride treatment - in senior centers and in schools.
- ✓ Creating the Washington Health Insurance Partnership to simplify and improve the purchasing of health insurance for individuals and employees of small businesses.
- ✓ Expanding the capacity of local health departments to provide core public health functions, such as controlling the spread of communicable diseases, improving immunization rates, and addressing environmental health concerns.

THE WASL



Next year’s high school seniors – the Class of 2008 – will be the first group of Washington students to face the high-stakes graduation requirement known as the Washington Assessment of Student Learning, or WASL.

Yet close to one-third of the Class of ’08 failed to pass all three required sections. More troubling is the disproportionate number of students of color and special education students who did not meet the standards. The persistent achievement gap between different student populations – which remain despite years of education reform efforts – is a shameful reminder of the shortcomings of the system, not of our students.

We must set high expectations and standards for our children. But we have a constitutional duty – and a moral obligation – to equip every student with the skills he or she needs to be successful beyond high school. We should question:

- ✓ Whether the WASL ought to be the final determinant of a child’s future when we have neglected to provide what will help them achieve high standards.
- ✓ Whether withholding a diploma encourages life-long learning or merely invites students to drop out early.
- ✓ Whether we actually fund the type of world-class education system that produces the outcomes we expect.

Some students need more time to learn. Some may need different tools. This year, the legislature took some initial steps to address these issues:

- ✓ Delayed the math WASL as a graduation requirement from 2008 to 2013 and authorized the use of SAT, ACT, and Advanced Placement exam scores as alternative measures of proficiency to the reading and writing WASL tests.
- ✓ Expanded the use of diagnostic assessments to assist students, families and educators in identifying areas of academic weakness.
- ✓ Enhanced before- and after-school learning opportunities through partnerships with community-based organizations.
- ✓ Increased per pupil spending by 15% above the 2005-2007 level.

